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SUBJECT: BABIL PREPARES TO TRANSITION SONS OF IRAQ PROGRAM

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth M. hillas, PRT Leader, Babil PRT, Dept of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

This is a joint N. Babil ePRT/Babil PRT message.

¶1. (S) Babil Governor Salam, Provincial Director of Police BG Fadhil, 31st Army (IA) Brigade Commander BG Abdul Ameer and 4/3 BCT Commander Thomas James led a meeting September 16 in Hillah of the North Babil Tribal Conference to discuss transition of the Sons of Iraq (SOI) to GOI management. Governor Salam, BG Abdul Ameer, and BG Fadhil pledged to find work for SOIs by integrating some into the IA and Iraqi Police (IP) and finding civilian GOI positions if necessary. The North Babil Tribal Conference is a CF-created non-sectarian security committee of tribal leaders which meets monthly with CF and IA commanders. At this month's meeting, the participants, many of them SOI leaders, pressed for employment opportunities in the Police and Army and repeated requests for the construction of additional IP stations and IA bases. The Governor and BG Abdul Ameer pledged to make the SOI transition in the next month to Iraqi administration.

¶2. (S) After acknowledging the key role played by the SOIs in establishing security in North Babil, Governor Salam (ISCI) gave assurances that he and the GOI value the SOI program in North Babil and want to make the transition successful. He said he was committed to working with members of the SOI who had been former regime officials or were reconciled al-Qaeda (AQI) members, but that the GOI would not tolerate current SOIs who maintained ties to AQI. BG Abdul Ameer stated that, "there are killers and criminals among the SOI" and said AQI's goal was to infiltrate the SOIs. He cited several examples of cache finds and IED strikes very near SOI checkpoints which indicated SOI complicity in these terrorist activities. BG Fadhil, without elaborating, said any SOIs who associated with Jaysh al-Mahdi and AQI would be arrested.

¶3. (S) Without providing details, MG Abdul Ameer said the SOI transition from CF to IA management would happen in the next month, independent of any transition of security responsibilities from CR to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). Pressed about pending construction of police stations in Jurf as Sukr, formerly an AQI stronghold and Babil province's only Sunni-majority Nahiya, BG Fadhil pledged to construct at least two new IP stations in the coming year in Jurf Al-Sakr, as well as an additional IP station (already planned and approved) in Khidr.

¶4. (S) Comment: GOI and IA planning for the transition is at an early stage of development. Nonetheless, the Governor, IA and IP chiefs were consistently on message, repeatedly thanking the tribal leaders for their successful fight against AQI to establish security and offering assurances of continued employment. With registration and GOI vetting of current SOIs expected shortly, SOI leaders are concerned about the GOI's ability to manage the program and transition SOIs to full-time,

permanent employment. No SOIs from North Babil have yet been absorbed into the IA or IP, despite more than 1,500 having been cleared for employment, giving SOI leaders grounds for skepticism. CF commitment to continue the program in the event the GOI is slow off the mark will be an important insurance against the risk of diminished security and lawlessness as SOI management transitions.

HILLAS